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STRENGTHENING OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND COORDINATION OF EFFORTS TO STUDY, MITIGATE AND MINIMIZE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CHERNOBYL DISASTER

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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Chernobyl: humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation programme

In May 1993 the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is planning to convene, in cooperation with the Ukrainian Red Cross, an international workshop in Kiev that will be devoted to the role of non-governmental organizations, specifically the Red Cross, in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident.

The Federation's involvement in alleviating the consequences of the accident goes back to the beginning of 1990 when it was approached by the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics with an appeal for humanitarian assistance.

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The Federation has been involved in the past in man-made disasters of this type; however, it still does not feel competent enough to make judgements on the scope of the catastrophe and far-reaching statements with regard to the most appropriate means of mitigating and minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

The Federation also does not consider that it should play an independent role in assisting the victims of the catastrophe, since it does not possess either enough competence or relevant resources. It is prepared rather to join other institutions and organizations that are better placed to confront this extremely challenging task.

Nevertheless, in the beginning of 1990 the Federation invited a group of international experts to assist it in designing the programme that could be relevant to the needs of the victims and at the same time correspond to the Red Cross mandate.

Pursuant to the recommendations of the international expert group the League, in cooperation with the Red Cross Societies of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, started at the end of 1990 a programme that was aimed at promoting greater awareness of the actual dangers of contamination and the safeguards to be employed against them through establishing a public information/health education programme.

The major elements of this programme are:

(a) Six mobile laboratories operating in Belarus (Gomel and Mogilev), the Russian Federation (Bryansk and Kursk) and Ukraine (Zhitomir and Rovno). Those laboratories staffed with a crew of six experts are equipped with the following devices:

(i) Whole-body monitors;

(ii) Food monitors (two pes);

(iii) Portable gamma radiation dosimeters (two pes);

(iv) Blood-testing equipment;

(v) Urine-testing equipment;

(b) Twenty food monitors distributed equally among the national Red Cross Societies;

(c) Three hundred fifty portable gamma radiation meters operated by the national Red Cross Societies.

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SPECIAL ECONOMIC, HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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DISASTERS AND HUMANITARIAN VALUES

Humanitarian action in a global village

The humanitarian gap

The number of people suffering in disasters is increasing. There may be occasional annual dips, but the trend is inexorably upward. The number of people living in poverty - on the brink of losing their livelihoods or their very lives - is continually rising as well.

As an agency very much involved with responding to the human need thrust suddenly upon us by disaster, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is greatly concerned by these ever-increasing numbers. What is of even greater concern is the fact that the gap between that which needs to be done and that for which we have the resources is growing. In the last five years IFRC spending on disaster response has risen from under 100 million to over 250 million Swiss francs per year but the needs to be met have risen at a much greater rate. Be it the sharecropper in the Caribbean, the landless labourer in Bangladesh, the villager in China or the farmer in southern Africa, the destitution he or she suffers after disaster - if he or she is still alive - multiplies on a scale no single agency or country can hope to meet.

Today more than ever before, the necessity exists of seeing humanitarian needs as common concerns, not as local or national problems. Like human dignity and hope, the right to give to and receive from, one's fellow men compassion and commitment and when disaster strikes the assistance needed to overcome that disaster shall be considered a universally shared value. This universality, which links people to people regardless of nation, is one of the fundamental principles of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and a principle that the movement would gladly see extended to all who suffer in disaster or are in a position to respond to such suffering.

Disaster preparedness and rehabilitation

Not only does the scale of disaster today necessitate universal concern, but it simply cannot be tackled in a reactive fashion. Disasters are not inevitable. There can be no disaster without vulnerable people. This axiom applies as aptly to the so-called natural disasters such as earthquakes as to the more complex disasters such as famine and human conflict. Over the past two years there has been a great deal of international attention concentrated upon disaster relief and emergency response-assistance after the act. While applauding this increased concern for the plight of the disaster victim IFRC wishes to remind the disaster response community that where communities and agencies have invested in preparedness measures, or where organizations have had the courage to confront the root causes of vulnerability to disaster and attempted to prevent its occurrence in the first place, the effect of disaster is greatly reduced. Even in disaster relief a much more long-term perspective is called for.

All relief has either a positive or a negative effect on the future vulnerability of those who survive. All disaster relief is inevitably linked to rehabilitation. High-profile emergency relief may be necessary, but it is not sufficient. International agencies and Governments acting in international assistance must invest in disaster preparedness and be willing to invest in rehabilitation if they are to reduce the occurrence of disaster and see their relief programmes provide meaningful and sustainable solutions.

The freedom to act across the world, to save lives and livelihoods, must be balanced by a responsibility to invest in reducing the future likelihood of disaster. Agencies responding to disaster must not be seduced by the high profile and rapid impact of disaster relief.

IFRC believes that investment in disaster preparedness must be carried out within the disaster-prone community - not just among the international response agencies. Just as people are vulnerable to disasters, so have they capacities to withstand them. Investment in those capacities is the very meat of preparedness and rehabilitation. Households, communities, indigenous organizations and local Government are the front-line troops in the battle against disaster. It is here that we must be willing to invest.

Investing in disaster preparedness will help reduce the long-term occurrence of disaster, but will not eliminate it. When disaster strikes, there is still a need for rapid and appropriate assistance - often international assistance will be appropriate; but with such assistance comes a host of new problems, prime among them being the problem of aid coordination.

Relief aid coordination

Within the continuum of action, from preparedness to rehabilitation, the International Federation and its national societies have a particular interest in helping to improve the level of coordination of relief aid, especially within the non-governmental organization sector.

In this context, IFRC is seeking to provide a service that will enhance the effectiveness of non-governmental organization relief to disaster victims and be of value to both the non-governmental organization, and the donor and host government community. Such a service is needed because the number and diversity of international and national non-governmental organizations becoming involved in disaster relief are on the increase. In the mid-1980s over 150 non-governmental organizations were involved in disaster relief in the Sudan. Those ranged from organizations operating budgets comparable in size to those of agencies of the United Nations system to "one-man shows". In Armenia in 1989, in response to the earthquakes, some 500 people in 22 teams arrived in the first few days to assist in search and rescue. In Turkey in 1991, at least 44 non-governmental organizations not previously seen in the country gave assistance to the refugees leaving Iraq.

This plethora of diverse agencies, variously equipped and skilled, has led in the past to the inefficient use of relief resources and personnel. Lack of clarity over relief needs leads to inappropriate items' being supplied. On the ground, the less public and more difficult areas of assistance may be neglected as agencies unwittingly gravitate to the media's high ground. The slowness with which agencies come forward to provide for sanitation needs in refugee camps is a prime example of this.

For many Governments faced with a sudden influx of foreign relief workers, the non-governmental organization phenomenon is a perplexing one. Are these organizations to be treated like donor Governments or as agencies of the United Nations system? Who do the non-governmental organizations represent? By what right are they offering assistance? How does a Government create a mechanism for dealing with such a diverse collection of organizations? Many Governments find themselves confronted with these management issues at the same time that they are trying to deal with the crisis of the disaster that has struck their country.

For donor Governments trying to ensure that their aid is effectively targeted, conflicting and incomplete pictures of relief needs and uncertainty over the capacities of the organizations on the ground to deliver often lead to hesitation in resource commitment.

At the national level, poor coordination of relief efforts often stems from a lack of understanding of (a) actual needs that have to be met, (b) potential resources and capacities for meeting those needs and finally, (c) the organizational framework within which relief actions must be carried out. These uncertainties occur both within the non-governmental organization community and between them and the host Government and its institutions.

International-level coordination stems from a clear understanding of what is happening at the national level of the affected country complemented by a similar clarity on the part of donor countries. So, national-level coordination must be tackled before international-level coordination.

The key to action in this area is information quality. No non-governmental organization is going to let another direct its operations - nor should it - but if all non-governmental organizations work from the same agreed needs assessment, know each other's capacities on the ground, are aware of the organizational framework within which they must work, and know how the relief operation is progressing, they are more likely to work in a coherent manner.

The International Federation is taking the initiative to help facilitate non-governmental organization relief coordination. Through the provision of suitably trained and equipped delegates to national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, IFRC aims to provide the following four forms of assistance:

(a) Pre-disaster preparedness assistance to prepare for a possible coordination role, including the provision of training and communications equipment where appropriate;

(b) Assistance in times of disaster to carry out timely needs assessments and formulate effective relief action plans;

(c) Provision of specifically allocated and suitably equipped international personnel, in times of disaster, to assist national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in the critical work of gathering, analysing and sharing information pertinent to the disaster, within the responding non-governmental organization community, with a view to providing a common basis of understanding from which cooperation and coordination can grow;

(d) Assistance to national societies to develop the potential to act as a facilitator between the non-governmental organization community and the host Government, if so requested.

IFRC is not claiming a monopoly on improving relief coordination and indeed the implementation of such an initiative will require close cooperation with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and other coordinating bodies. In some countries it will be more appropriate for other indigenous non-governmental organizations to take the lead, but where a national society is asked to assist we are now committed to backing that assistance with human and financial resources.

Affirming humanitarian values

Today more than ever, disasters are not natural ocurrences or acts of God. They are complex developments where the forces of nature, economics, environmental stress and politics interact to destroy families and communities. More than ever before we need to reaffirm that the offering and provision of assistance to the disaster victim is an act of common, universally shared humanity. It is not partisan; it is not political. It is an act that we, as relief agencies, have the privilege to carry out on behalf of all humanity. Nor should the willingness to receive assistance be seen as anything other than an openness to compassion. All agencies that are involved in disaster response must safeguard this principle of universal humanity. The disaster response community must strive to open up the channels between the disaster victim and relief aid. Moreover, we must jealously guard those channels against their misuse for narrow political gain.

In affirming such a principle, IFRC recognizes that as non-governmental or international agencies we cannot act alone. We need in every country, the help of Governments and controlling forces to enable assistance to be delivered and futures rebuilt. At the very least there is a need to be confident that the flow of legitimate aid to disaster victims will not be deliberately impeded.

Today we are offered an opportunity as never before. With the ending of the cold war and the increased willingness to invest in international institutions, disaster response can be tackled with increased vigour. If we have the will to think in a universal, non-partisan manner, then today we have the opportunity to turn such thought into action.

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COORDINATION OF THE POLICIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND OTHER BODIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

Prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and programmes addressed to the mitigation of its negative socio-economic consequences

Statement submitted by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, category I

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 23 and 24 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23 May 1968.

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The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the global fight against AIDS

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, representing the 150 Red Cross and Red Crescent societies around the world, has traditionally been actively engaged in the struggle to improve health and protect human rights. The global epidemic of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) clearly represents a challenge in which the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies have an active and important role.

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* E/1992/100.

Before reviewing specific actions undertaken by the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies, it is useful to consider the philosophic, organizational and practical reasons for the Red Cross/Red Crescent's being well placed to serve a useful role in community, national and global efforts against this new pandemic.

First, it is vital that long-standing, respected non-governmental organizations become actively engaged in AIDS work. AIDS service organizations and other non-governmental organizations dedicated exclusively to AIDS prevention and care have made extremely important and creative contributions. Nevertheless, the long experience and the ability to ensure sustainability of projects and commitments characteristic of the Red Cross help ensure that AIDS work is not considered a marginal or temporary problem.

Second, the Red Cross is fundamentally a movement of communities linked by the dedication to common ideals and action. The strong community orientation of the Red Cross strengthens its ability to mobilize community support and action in favour of HIV prevention, AIDS care and protection of human rights and dignity.

Third, the linkage of national societies around the world within the Red Cross movement has fostered exchange of information, training opportunities and a pattern of global learning and sharing, which is so important in the work against HIV/AIDS. The sharing of resources and experience on AIDS among national societies combines the advantages of local and national specificity and creativity with international collaboration and solidarity.

Finally, respect for the guiding principles of the Red Cross movement requires that the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies become actively engaged in the protection of human rights and dignity, which has been recognized as central to an effective fight against AIDS.

Therefore, as a respected, long-standing, truly international non-governmental organization, the Red Cross/Red Crescent has undertaken a series of specific actions, in close collaboration with national Governments, intergovernmental organizations of the United Nations and other international non-governmental organizations.

Our principal lines of work have occurred in five areas. First, the International Federation has taken a strong position against AIDS-related discrimination, at the national and international levels. The clear statement of principles regarding the importance of respecting human rights and promoting human dignity in relation to HIV/AIDS had already been expressed in the resolution adopted by the Federation General Assembly in Rio in 1987 and reinforced by the decision adopted by the Federation General Assembly in Budapest in 1991. As just one example of national level work, the Thai Red Cross played a very important role in helping to advocate adoption of non-discriminatory AIDS-related legislation in Thailand.

Second, national societies have been actively involved in developing information and education programmes for a wide variety of target audiences. In many cases, Red Cross societies were the pioneers, developing the first country-specific information and education programmes.

Third, our national societies have identified education and support of youth as a high priority for Red Cross/Red Crescent work against AIDS. Accordingly, a special project on youth and AIDS called "Action for Youth" was created, based on the principle of peer education. This project has been developed in Europe, Africa and Latin America and will soon be extended to Asia.

Fourth, it was clear to the Red Cross/Red Crescent that while effective prevention was critically important, literally millions of women, men and children around the world would require counselling and care during the years to come. The recent projections of the Global AIDS Policy Coalition suggest that by the year 2000 24 million adults may have developed AIDS, along with millions of children; from 1992 to 1995 alone, the number of children orphaned by AIDS is expected to more than double, from 1.8 million today to 3.7 million in three years. Therefore, the Red Cross/Red Crescent has developed a strong care and counselling component, again with particular attention to local needs and capacities.

Finally, the Red Cross/Red Crescent, through its national societies and with the coordination of the International Federation AIDS Programme in Geneva, has worked actively to link efforts around the world, learn from successful community programmes, prevent isolation of any community or nation, enhance exchange of information and provide practical guidance to the many societies and thousands of volunteers whose work is the basis of the Red Cross movement.

The challenge of AIDS is enormous, but for the reasons mentioned above, it was clear from the start that the Red Cross movement would become an active participant in the new global struggle. In fact, more national societies are engaged in AIDS work than in any other single programme coordinated through our Federation offices in Geneva.

Yet the work to date is only the beginning. At the basis of the Red Cross movement is an understanding of health that is linked with humanitarian ideals, but also with social, economic and political realities. It is clear that in confronting AIDS, we must all be vigilant to prevent complacency and denial. Several expert organizations, such as the World Health Organization's Global Programme on AIDS and the aforementioned Global AIDS Policy Coalition, have warned that the global epidemic remains dynamic and that the major impacts of AIDS are yet to come. For this reason, we believe that the WHO Global AIDS Strategy must be continuously renewed and revised as needed, to ensure that it does not inadvertently underestimate either the pandemic or what will be needed to work effectively against it. This approach has been strongly reiterated in decision 31, adopted by the Federation General Assembly in Budapest in November 1991, reinforcing past Red Cross/Red Crescent statements and resolutions.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent is one of the largest international non-governmental organizations working in AIDS. We are working to ensure that the Red Cross/Red Crescent contributions to community, national and global AIDS prevention and care are productive, forward-looking and adapted both to local realities and to global perspectives. We consider ourselves to be a partner, with the United Nations system, national Governments and many other groups, in a global effort whose failure we refuse to consider, yet whose success will require much of us all. The strength of our movement is based on the power of our guiding principles: they are once again being tested, showing their relevance and usefully leading our work against this new global threat to health.